

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**CONSERVATION COVER**

(Acre)

CODE 327

**DEFINITION**

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

**PURPOSES**

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on land to be retired from agricultural production requiring permanent protective cover, and on other lands needing permanent protective cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Species shall be adapted to soil, range site, and climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of invasive species shall [not be permitted](#).

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose.

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival.

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used.

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological or chemical methods, by prescribed burning, or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, Prescribed Burning, practice code 338, must be included as a planned practice. .

All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

**Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat**

**Planting/Establishment.** Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity.

**Management/Maintenance.** Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

### CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites. [Other conservation practices like grassed waterways may be needed to complete the erosion control plan.](#)

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g. mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

Use native species when available. [Avoid using crown vetch in any of the mixes. If the area is near a grazing system avoid tall fescues in the mix unless it is guaranteed endophyte free seed. It is suspected that this endophyte infected cultivar has been deleterious to wildlife as well, so use caution with “conservation mixes”. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site as the priority planting option.](#)

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They shall include, but are not limited to, recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures, and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

[Temporary cover during the first year of establishment is allowed if:](#)

1. [Required seeds or plant stocks are not available.](#)
2. [The normal planting period for the species has passed.](#)
3. [Where chemical residue does not allow for establishment of intended planting.](#)

**Temporary Cover.** [Where planting is delayed due to the above reasons, seed one of the following:](#)

- [Winter Rye - 1-1/2 Bushel/Acre](#)
- [Oats - 1-1/2 Bushel/Acre](#)
- [Annual Ryegrass - 8 Pounds/Acre](#)

[Temporary cover crops should be clipped or killed to prevent excessive completion to the permanent seeding.](#)

Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

The specifications shall include:

- [Location](#)
- [Field Number](#)
- [Acreage](#)
- [Species, rate, and method of planting](#)
- [Seeding dates](#)
- [Any maintenance requirements applicable](#)
- [Soil test results and fertilizer recommendations](#)

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species in each state.

Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended. [Control class A and B weeds under Vermont Department of Agriculture Food and Markets quarantine rules on noxious weeds.](#)

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.